

Journey into the Christmas Spirit

Christmas brings attractions and a warm holiday spirit to Moscow city center

December 18, 2017



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Every year the center of Moscow is transformed into a magical holiday village, lit up with lights and filled with something for the whole family to see, do, enjoy, eat or drink. Most of the action stretches from the central squares by the Kremlin, up Tverskaya Ulitsa and along Tverskoi Bulvar. But be sure to walk over to Kuznetsky Most and Novy Arbat. Each city neighborhood has holiday trees and treats, too.

This year the celebrations begin on Dec. 22 in time for Western Christian Christmas and end on Jan. 14, after Orthodox Christmas. That's when all the activities will be booming, but the decorations are out and the lights are already on ✕✕—✕✕ perfect for pre-holiday strolling.

Here are just some of the highlights of the celebrations.

1 + 2: FOREST AND ICE. Manage Square will be covered with an enormous forest of fir and pine

trees — a labyrinth of over 500 trees, the perfect stage for immersion theater productions. After getting lost and found, wander through the holiday fair, take the kids to some master classes, and then dive down the city's tallest and longest ice slide. Queues will be short as riders dash up to and slide down the four slopes.

Don't worry about getting hungry on Ploshchad Revolyutsii – check out the blinis at Zhar-Ptitsa, where you can choose add-ons like raspberries and mascarpone, honey, nuts, and other delights.

3: FABULOUS FIRS. Need some ideas for this year's tree decorations? On Kuznetsky Most you can see trees specially decorated by some of Russia's top designers — and plenty of shops and chalets where you can pick up unique ornaments to create your own holiday masterpiece.

4: BONNE ANNÉE. Tverskaya Ploshchad, under the monument to Moscow founder Yuri Dolgoruky, is hosting theater troupes from a dozen countries who will put on their holiday shows every day. The square will also have chalets selling pre- or post-theater treats and one-of-a-kind gifts from all over Russia and Europe. You can also warm up watching glass blowers.

There will be lots of food stands all over the holiday center, not to mention the restaurants and cafes that will open their doors to diners. But if you're hungry, especially for sweets, head for Yuri Dolgoruky. Here you can try a Lithuanian treat called sakotis, a sweet pastry cooked on a turning spit. After a sakotis, move to another chalet and try a different spit cake called trdelnik, traditionally made in the Czech lands. That one is dusted with powdered sugar and cinnamon. And there will be plenty of Russian confectioners selling traditional Christmas sweets with plenty of hot tea.

5: ICE AND LIGHTS. Pushkin Square and the boulevards off it will be lit up with lights, decorations, chalets, and trees — and filled with the sounds of the season. The most exciting part -- the ice theater starring such figure skating legends as Tatyana Navka and Pyotr Chernyshyov. Over the holidays there will be ice performances of "The Nutcracker," "Cinderella," "Cipollino," and "Snow White." Watch ballet on ice, take a spin around the rink, and then sit back with some mulled wine and enjoy a winter concert.

In other places the seasonal excitement continues. New Arbat will be host to a slew of attractions including balance boarding and snowball fights, all wrapped up in chill beats as DJs play in the snowboard park. From Dec. 22 to Jan. 14 a theater-themed scavenger hunt will be held for the "Journey to Christmas" festival. Those interested need to get a "participant's passport" from one of the 14 quest houses located on the festival grounds. By correctly answering questions and accomplishing challenges participants will receive gold coins and seals in their competition passports. These marks of success can be cashed in for prizes at Christmas stores on Tverskoi Bulvar.

For more information about events, check out mos.ru.